

Guardian  
11 NOV '82

Approved For Release 2007/12/14 : CIA-RDP96B01172R000300030013-2

# Communication spy gaoled for 38 years

By Nick Davies

The Attorney-General yesterday recited a catalogue of security failures which had allowed Geoffrey Prime — to inflict "exceptionally grave damage" on the state during his 14 years working for the Soviet Union.

Sir Michael Havers, who was prosecuting at the Old Bailey, said that Prime had survived two positive vettings and escaped all internal security systems before being caught by local police who had been jogged into action by his wife.

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The Lord Chief Justice, Lord Lane, gaoled Prime for 38 years: 35 years for seven counts of spying and an additional three years for three counts of indecent assaults on young girls.

The court sat in camera while Sir Michael gave the details of the information which Prime had passed. In an open court Sir Michael said: "Prime came to have access to information ranging from the simply sensitive to matters of the very highest secrecy such that their communication to an enemy would cause exceptionally grave damage to the interests and security of this country and its allies."

Sir Michael added that the speculation—inspired by American intelligence: leaks—that

Prime had leaked the whereabouts of nuclear weapons and endangered the lives of clandestine British agents was not supported by the evidence.

He said that Prime had been positively vetted in 1968 before moving from the RAF at London Outpost of the Government Headquarters and again in 1974 before moving to work on highly sensitive material. Prime had travelled to Potsdam, Berlin, and Vienna on his own passport without being challenged.

Sir Michael gave no indication that Prime had ever been under suspicion while routinely photographing and removing top secret documents and microfiches from GCHQ offices in Cheltenham and London.

The court heard that Prime, now aged 44, was recruited in January 1968 when he was working for the RAF in Berlin. During his spying career he had been offered the rank of colonel in the KGB—the rank finally given to Kim Philby—and had risen to be a section head at the top secret Government eavesdropping base in Cheltenham.

His two KGB contacts in Berlin, named only as Igor and Valya, had trained him how to use microdots, miniature cameras and invisible ink, given him the codename "Rowlands" and taught him his personalised password: an agent would say, "I believe we met in Pittsburgh in 1968" and Prime would reply "No, at that time I was in Berlin."



RHONA PRIME: challenged her husband

Prime's spying equipment—supplied by the KGB—was exhibited in court: a briefcase with a false bottom, a radio and a tape recorder for receiving instructions, code pads, envelopes addressed to Berlin, instructions on the use of microdots as well as secret documents which were found at Prime's home in Cheltenham.

Sir Michael said that Prime had posted information in coded letters to East Germany, left one batch in a London wood, and flown with documents and photographs to Pots-

dam and Vienna, once spending several days being debriefed on a Russian cruiser on the Danube.

He worked his way through RAF signals intelligence to a London outpost of the Government Communications Headquarters and finally to its Cheltenham base, using his skill as a Russian linguist to read intercepted Soviet signals and communications.

The court heard that Prime resigned from GCHQ in September 1977, twice considered defecting to Russia but chose to stay with his wife, Rhona and three stepsons. Working as a taxi driver and as a travelling salesman, he committed three indecent assaults.

After police interviewed him about the assaults his wife challenged him and he confessed his guilt to her. He showed her a file of 2,287 cards on which he had logged the names and ages of young girls in the area and details of phone calls he had made to their homes.

She persuaded him to give himself up to the police. Before he did so he confessed to her that he had also been a spy. After three weeks Mrs Prime decided to tell the police this as well. A search of their house uncovered his spying equipment and after a long series of interviews Prime admitted the spying as well as the sex offences.

Mrs Prime gave evidence on her husband's behalf yesterday. She said that she had not known what to do about his

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GEOFFREY ARTHUR PRIME: 14 years of espionage ...  
38 years in gaol

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# 'Indicators' spy gets 38 years

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confession to spying: "I took legal advice and I had a choice. I didn't have to do it. But morally I had to tell the authorities. As a Christian I couldn't live with that on my conscience and on my husband's conscience.

"I believe in the end that I have done my husband a favour and, hopefully, the country a favour as well. He has taken it incredibly well. He has become a changed man. He has lost the terrible burden that he has carried for so many years. He was incredibly unhappy; he was just a tortured person.

"He has made a friend in prison—for the first time in his life. I believe that, for the

first time Geoffrey Prime has discovered a goal in life. I utterly condemn the terrible crimes he has committed, but I forgive him because he is totally repentant and remorseful. He is so full of guilt; he is broken by it. I intend to stand by him."

At the end of his written confession to police Prime said: "Looking back over the entire period, I deeply regret the extent of the betrayal manifested by my activities which were in breach of the trust placed in me by my government.

"I believe that I first embarked on these activities partly as a result of a misplaced idealistic view of Soviet socialism which was compounded by basic psychological

problems within myself. These problems had made me susceptible to the type of propaganda which I became aware of during my service in West Berlin.

"I am also deeply ashamed and find it difficult to express my remorse in words in relation to the anguish and suffering which I have caused for my wife and family."

Mr George Carman QC, for Prime, said he was "desperately lonely, totally inadequate and a sexual and social misfit." He had been tormented by doubts about what he was doing, said Mr Carman, and had undertaken to cooperate with security officers who wanted to interview him in greater depth after the trial.

American intelligence

officers arrived in Cheltenham last week to assess the damage done by Prime. It was American speculation over this which made Downing Street last week order that Prime's trial should be brought forward from its planned date, November 29.

Sentencing Prime, the Lord Chief Justice said: "It is perfectly clear that a huge proportion of the damage you have done is quite irreparable. You must suffer the result of the choice that you have made. The result is designed to punish you and to mark the public abhorrence of the crimes which you have committed and finally, of course, to deter others who may toy with the idea of treachery in the future."